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# fantabulous

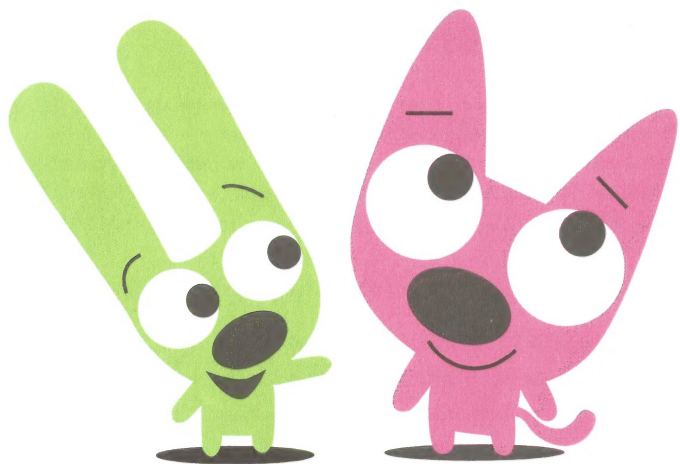
Writing  
guide



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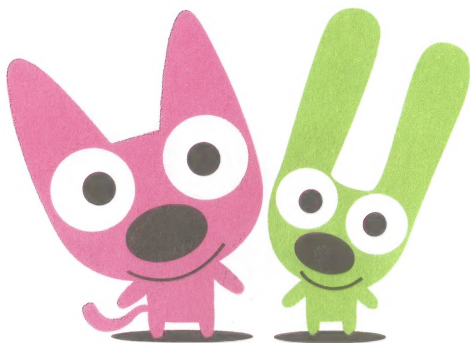
hoops&yoyo™  
**fantabulous**  
**Writing Guide**



by Kris Hirschmann  
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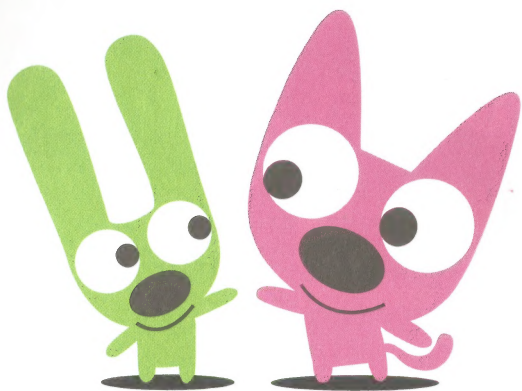
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## Introduction

Hiiiiii! Welcome to our book!!! We're SUPER excited about it. We have sooooo many things to tell you!!

Oh wait, we almost forgot to tell you what it's ABOUT! Yikes, maybe we need more coffee!! Okay, so, this book is all about writing. We LOVE writing, because it's fun to make people smile with our greeting cards. It's the most awesomest-bestest job ever! We see people writing ALL THE TIME and we know it's, like, really great.

So, anyway, we think EVERYONE should write. Including you. And oh, by the way, don't worry, we asked a techno-brainy author to handle the explaining stuff. We had to help out in a few places, though. (Shhhh! Don't tell her! We don't want to hurt her feelings!!)

Okay, so, we're ready. How about you? You LOOK ready! Start reading and have fun!!!

XOXOXO,





# Comfy = Good

THAT'S where  
you write?

you betcha! it  
makes my mind AND  
my body comfy!



Would you sleep well in a bed with no mattress? Nope, probably not. Can you do homework while your little brother pokes you repeatedly with a toy sword? Well, duh! Of course not. Those situations are uncomfortable and distracting. They make it impossible to do things well.

Writing is like that. It's really hard if you choose a bad time and place. In the *right* time and place, however, it's a lot easier. It can even be—dare we say it?—FUN. It feels good to express yourself!

So let's go after that warm and fuzzy feeling. We're going to start by making our minds and bodies comfy. The tips in this chapter will prepare you to write right!

### **Tip 1:** Read Something (Yes, Really)

This isn't exactly a pre-writing tip. It's more like a pre-, pre-, pre-writing tip, because you have to do it waaay before you can be a writer. In a nutshell, here it is: READ. READ. READ.

See, here's the thing. Reading is the absolute best way to prepare yourself to write. That's because reading exposes you to good English usage. And how cool is this—you'll start to learn stuff AUTOMATICALLY! Yep, that's right. The more you read, the more you'll notice that things just sound "right" or "wrong." You might not know exactly *why* they're



right or wrong, but that doesn't matter. You will *know*.

The same goes for grammar, by the way. Like anything else, good grammar takes practice. Reading is the easiest way to get this practice.

If you absolutely have to, you can do a few exercises to improve your grammar skills. Pick up whatever resources you need (ask your teacher for some recommendations).

Then practice until you're sure you get it.



**READ. READ. READ.**

## **Tip 2:** Start Your Own Library

Preparation may be the first step. But finding good tools—that is, the things you'll use during the actual writing process—is a close second. The right stuff gives you the “write” stuff for sure!

Reference books are at the top of the “right stuff” list. A great reference library includes a dictionary, a thesaurus, and an English grammar book. Use the dictionary to check the meanings and spellings of words. Use the thesaurus when you want to find synonyms. (You know what that means, right? A synonym is a word that is close in meaning to another word.) Use the grammar book to check your punctuation, sentence structure, and paragraph structure.

An encyclopedia is a gotta-have-it writing aid as well. Not long ago, most writers had their very own big, bulky, multi-volume encyclopedia sets. Today, though, online encyclopedias are the way to go. Find one you like and learn how to use it. This reference source will put many subjects at your fingertips. It will also save you LOTS of trips to the library.



the thesaurus  
is **awesome!**

**awesome** = cool!  
excellent! **neato!** nifty!  
synonyms are  
**FUNtastic!**



### **Tip 3:** Tools of the Trade

You've taken care of the preparation basics. Now you're ready to take the next step. It's time to choose your actual writing method.

Did you hear us say “choose”? You sure did! There are many, many ways to write. You should pick the one that suits you best. For instance, do you like typing? Fantastic! Then learn to use a computer and a word-processing program. You could even go old school and peck away on an actual typewriter. Just let those fingers fly until the job is done.

But what if the typing thing sounds awful to you? Let’s say you feel better when you’re forming actual words on actual paper. In this case, longhand writing might be your speed. Choose a favorite pen or pencil and a notebook or pad of paper that opens flat. These tools will help you to scribble in style.

If you don’t want to scribble or type, maybe dictation is a better choice. Speak your thoughts into a recording device. When you’re done, listen to the recording and write down what you said. Ta-da! Writing done!



i can type a BILLION  
words a minute.

how about a little  
test to prove that?



#### **Tip 4:** Find the Right Place and Time

Okay, you have your writing tools. Now you just need the right place to use them—and the right place, of course, is wherever you feel comfy-cozy. Is it in your room? At the dining room table? At a desk in the family room? On a branch in your favorite tree? It's all good. Remember, the right place is *any* place where you have the tools, the space, the lighting, and the quiet you need to concentrate.

Oh, and let's not forget the TIME. That's a really important part of writing! To do your best work, choose a time of day or night when you are alert and not tempted to do something else (like watch your favorite TV show). You should also let family members know you won't be taking phone calls. Dump these distractions and others so you can concentrate and really ROCK your writing!

How long should this distraction-free period last? That's up to you. Decide in advance exactly how much uninterrupted time you think you'll need. Promise yourself you will work at least this long. Then stick to your schedule. In other words: Keep your rear in gear as long as you said you would.

A kitchen timer can be handy in this situation. Before you sit down to write, set the timer for your allotted work period. Then write, write, write until the timer goes off. If you're done at that point, great! You can call it a day. If not, add ten minutes to the timer so you can finish the job you started.





keep that rear  
in gear, buddy.

I like second gear.  
second gear is the  
**BEST!** or maybe  
third. it's a little scary,  
but it's **super** speedy!



## **Tip 5:** Love the Paper

Of course, you have to START something before you can finish it. And let's be honest here: In writing, getting started can be the hardest part. A blank piece of paper (or a blank computer screen) seems to stare, well, blankly back at you. It can be scary to look at all that emptiness and realize it's your job to fill it.

But here's the good news. That paper doesn't actually care what you write. It will let you speak out of turn, make mistakes, have strong opinions, display knowledge, or even reveal secrets. In short, it will accept anything you want to say. It will let you change your mind, too. It's *your* paper, so you can revise, revamp, and rewrite as often as you wish. No risk, no harm, no foul.

So don't be scared to start. Greet that piece of paper as you would a friend. Learn to love it, if you possibly can. Remember, every blank space is a potential work of art—and *that's* what being a good writer is all about!



i'm drawing  
a blank.



and it's a work  
of ART, dude!  
sweeeeet!

# The Warm-Up



what the heck  
are  
you doing, yoyo?

warm-ups, dude.  
i'm getting ready  
to write!



Have you ever watched baseball? Before the game, the players stretch and toss balls back and forth. Maybe they swing bats. They do these things to prepare their minds and bodies. They know they can't play their best without the proper warm-up.

The same goes for writing. Okay, maybe you don't need a *physical* warm-up to write a letter, or a paper, or a story. But *mental* preparation is essential. You need to get your brain on track and your creativity in gear. The right mindset makes it possible for ideas and words to flow.

There's nothing magical about this process. It just takes a little bit of know-how—and we've got you covered. Follow the simple steps in this chapter to warm up those writing muscles!

### **Tip 6:** Make Notes. Lots of Them

Finding ideas is the trickiest step for most new writers. Well, that's no surprise. It IS hard to get creative on the spur of the moment. That's why great writers stockpile ideas. You can do it, too! Get a blank book, a spiral notebook, a file folder with loose sheets of paper, or anything else you can use as a journal. Keep your journal handy so you can jot down ideas whenever inspiration strikes.

Where do you find this inspiration? Anywhere, really. Some ideas might come straight from your imagination, your dreams, or your daydreams. Make up story ideas or poems based on these things. For instance, you could write about the best dream you ever had—or the scariest one!

Other ideas might come from your environment. Keep your eyes and ears open. When you feel your mind going blank, fill that empty space with the things you see and hear all around you.

Written materials are another good source of inspiration. Use your journal to collect favorite poems, quotations, song lyrics, newspaper cartoons, jokes, or anything else you like. All of these things can lead to fantastic ideas.

These suggestions are just a start. Get as creative as you like. Anything goes! In fact, there's really only one rule when it comes to your journal: USE IT. Regularly. Don't worry about neatness, grammar, or punctuation. Just write, and worry about the details later.





## Tip 7: Find the Right Words

Your language choice is one of these details. Good writers use colorful words, phrases, and idioms. Usually writers don't make these things up. They hear them somewhere and remember them, or scribble them down. Then they rouse these gems in their own writing.

A list of words and phrases is sometimes called a *word bank*. You should have one—and your journal is the perfect place to keep it. Write down new words you learn or words you simply like. You can also jot down words that describe your feelings, words from songs, and even words

you overhear in other people's conversations. (But don't eavesdrop. That's rude.)

Keeping a word bank is cool because it makes you more aware of the spoken word. Before you know it, you'll be on the lookout for more and more items to add to your list. You might even find that this activity becomes a hobby. It's kind of like collecting stickers or sports cards, but it's way easier and cheaper. Oh, and it's better for your writing skills, too!



coffee. BFF.  
boogie. niiiice.

hey, your word  
bank is awesome!



### **Tip 8:** Know Your Interests

So let's say you have a journal full of ideas and words. You're preparing to sit down and write something. Maybe

It's just for fun, or maybe you have a school assignment.

Either way, where do you start?

Start with your interests, of course! It's *always* easiest to write about things that fascinate you. As soon as you decide to write, ask yourself a few key things: *What* is interesting about the topic? *Who* would be interested in it? Most importantly, how can you make it interesting to *yourself*? Answer these questions to figure out what slant or angle you might bring to your work.

This technique works even for boring assignments. You can usually make a writing job easier and more interesting by making it more personal. For instance, maybe your teacher tells you to write about the ancient Egyptians. You're not totally thrilled by this topic. You do, however, remember the time you saw mummies at a museum. You could write about that experience, then add information about the mummification process. See how it works? You just made a "blah" assignment personal. That means you'll be more interested in the work, and you'll do a better job as a result—guaranteed.



**Tip 9:**

**Get a Purpose**

Nailing down your topic is the first step. Identifying your *purpose*—that is, what you're trying to say and who you're trying to reach—is the second. You need to answer this question before you can start to write.

There are four basic purposes in writing. You can write to express yourself; to give information; to persuade people; or simply to be creative. So, what are YOU doing? Are you

trying to describe your feelings? To explain facts? Are you trying to change someone's mind about something? Or are you writing a story, a poem, or a play just for the sheer fun of it?

These four approaches are very different. Not surprisingly, they require different writing styles. So think carefully about your purpose before you start to write. Understanding your ultimate goal will let you choose the words, the tone, and even the reference books you need to get your point across.



## **Tip 10:** Try Free Writing. No Charge!

At this point, your warm-up is nearly complete. There's just one thing left to do, and that's WRITE. Right?

Welllll . . . That might be easier said than done. Just because you know what to do doesn't mean you're actually ready to do it. Sometimes you need just a tad more grease on the ol' writing wheel.

In this situation, a technique called *free writing* might be the lubricant you need. Free writing is super simple. Just grab a piece of paper or your journal, then set a timer for three minutes. Write whatever pops into your mind during that period. Don't worry about full sentences or even sensible sentences. Feel free to be free!

If that sounds a little too loosey-goosey for your liking, you could try idea-based free writing. This type of exercise starts with a specific word or phrase. Here's an example of free writing based on the words "hoops&yoyo."



hoops & yoyo

Green and

pink. **Funny,**

SMILING, goofy,

gabby! **Kitties**

and **bunnies,**

**hop hop** in

the park. **Best**

*friends* forever

and a **cup** of

**coffee,** too. **BIG**

**eyes** and **bigger**

 **hearts.**

Looky-looky here,

it's a card for **YOU!**



You can see from this example that free writing gets the ideas flowing. But it does more than that. It also sharpens your focus and gets you writing. And once you've started, well, why stop? Keep that pencil sharpened and those words coming. You're well on your way to writing success!

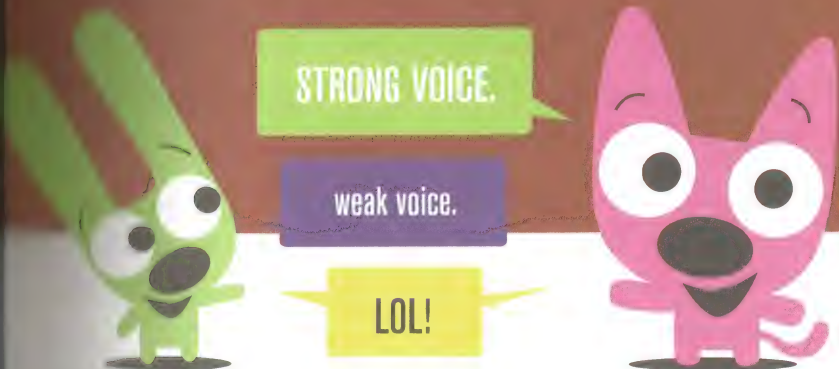


free **stuff** is all  
**WRITE** with me!

yeah! i love  
**free** stuff!!  
**free free free!**



# Say It Strong



Let's talk for a moment about singing. Yes, singing. Many people, frankly, are pretty bad at it. Their voices are thin and out of tune. It's no fun to listen to them.

Some lucky folks, however, are GREAT singers. Their voices are powerful and confident. You feel like you could listen to these people forever.

Writers are a lot like singers. Each writer has his or her own "voice." Writers with weak voices tend to bore their

readers. Writers with strong voices, on the other hand, are captivating. They make people want to read . . . and read . . . and then read some more.

YOU want to be this kind of writer, don't you? Of course you do! And the good news is, we're about to show you how. This chapter tells you how to say it strong!

### **Tip 11:** **Get Organized**

Good writing is about organization. Review any facts or bits of information you've gathered, then put them in order of importance. Jotting down quick notes is an easy way to do this. You don't have to use complete sentences. Include just enough information to guide your thoughts.

Once you have done this, it's time to take the next step. Look over your list of ideas and facts to see how they relate to each other. For instance, you might identify facts that relate to the categories Who, What, When, Where, Why, or How. It should be pretty clear which ones belong together.

This means you can now create a *new* list. Lump your lists into their appropriate groups. Then arrange the groups in an order that makes sense. For instance, you might start with When, Where, What, and Who, then move on to Why and How.

The exact order of your groups might not match this example. It all depends on what you're trying to communicate. A good arrangement is one that lets you express your ideas clearly, logically, and simply. It's the strongest possible foundation for your writing project.



## **Tip 12:** Start Strong

Now you know what you want to say and how you want to say it. And that can only mean one thing. The time has arrived—finally!!—for you to actually start writing.

But just any old start won't do. Nosiree! You want a **STRONG** start. A start that makes a **STATEMENT**. A start that **HOOKS** your audience and makes them want to hang on your every written word. In other words, you need a great opening sentence.

There are lots of ways to tackle this task. The dramatic approach, for example, can be very effective. It makes readers curious enough to keep going. Here's a sentence that hits the mark:

The evil marshmallow crept up to the tent and raised his flabby arms.

Evil marshmallow? Tent?? Flabby arms??? You really need to find out what happens next. *No one* will stop reading after an opening like that.



Making things personal is another great way to hook your readers. Write an opening sentence that makes people care about what you are going to say. For instance, you might touch on something that affects the reader. You could also add a familiar human figure, such as a grandmother or a funny uncle, to humanize your topic. This sentence does both:

Thanks to my best friend, I learned to love eating sandwiches in the middle of the night.

Let's do a quick personal-interest check. Best friend? Sure, practically everyone has one. Midnight sandwiches? Well, who doesn't like THOSE? Readers can identify with the topics in this sentence. As a result, they're likely to keep reading.

They'll also keep reading if you hit them with cool facts. This approach is especially good if you're writing something informative. Here's a sentence that explains your main idea in an attention-catching way:

People have sent more than 50 million hoops&yoyo e-cards since 2004.

Wow, that's a whole lot of electronic cards! If you're interested in hoops&yoyo—and who isn't?—this fascinating fact will make you want to learn more.



hey, i wrote that  
sentence about  
the marshmallow!  
really!

riiiight. there's no such thing  
as an evil marshmallow.



### **Tip 13:** Build Good Structure

You've caught your readers' attention with a fantastic opening sentence, and that's great. Really! But your writing job has just begun. Now you need to *keep* that attention. A strong structure is the tool you need to accomplish this goal.

Good structure starts at the paragraph level. A paragraph is a group of sentences that work together to help the reader understand one main idea. A sentence called the *topic sentence* expresses this idea. The other sentences give more information that support the main idea. Your job is to put the sentences together in a logical, sensible order.

It's important, too, to make sure that every sentence in a paragraph belongs there. For instance, if you're writing about green bunnies, don't randomly throw in a comment about apple pie. It's all about focus. Keep it, and you'll keep your readers' attention as well.

This job doesn't end after one paragraph, of course. You want people to *keep* reading—and this is another place where structure makes a *biiiiig* difference. A well-thought-out, well-structured paper is fun to read. An organizational mess is confusing, boring, and all too easy to toss aside. Don't let this happen to YOUR writing. Organize your paragraphs to avoid a snooze-fest!

How does it work? Well, let's take a look. You might structure a paper about pink cats like this:

**Paragraph 1:** Pink cats are rare and wonderful creatures.

**Paragraph 2:** What are the physical characteristics of pink cats?

**Paragraph 3:** What are the personality traits of pink cats?

**Paragraph 4:** Who is the world's most popular pink cat?  
(We think you know the answer to this one!)

See how that works? You're starting with a general overview about pink cats. You then describe some specific traits. Finally, you give a fantabulous example of pink-cat perfection. The flow makes sense, and readers will stick with you all the way.

**Tip 14:**

**Punch Things Up**

They'll be even happier if you treat them to a little verbal flair at the same time! It's not hard to give your writing that "Wow" factor. Just follow a few simple rules to get the job done.

The first rule is easy: Keep your paragraphs short. It's better to have more paragraphs with fewer sentences than fewer paragraphs with more sentences. Short paragraphs make things easier to read. (And here's a bonus: They're easier to *write*, too.)

While we're on the subject of paragraphs, let's talk for a moment about transitions. A transition is a written connection between one idea and the next. Transitional words such as *after*, *finally*, *meanwhile*, *across*, *over*, and *under* help people to follow your thinking. And this makes your work fun to read.

Details are also part of the fun factor. Details may seem small, but they're a BIG thing in good writing. Touch, sound, smell, taste, and sight provide the sensory touches that bring your writing to life.

Let's see how this works. Consider this paragraph, which offers few details:

Hoops&yoyo walked out of the house, buckets in hand. They were dressed in ghost costumes.

The friends had fun trick-or-treating at their neighbors' houses.

Now take a look at this paragraph. It provides the same basic information, but it adds many sensory details.

Hoops&yoyo walked out of the house into the dark, moonlit night, buckets in hand. The friends wore classic ghost costumes: simple sheets with eye holes as black as the clear October sky. A brisk wind moaned through bare tree branches as the friends bounded up their neighbors' steps. "Trick or treat!" they shouted, shivering with a combination of cold and delight.

You can see from this second paragraph that more details = more fun. So feel free to go a little detail-crazy! Don't just *tell* your readers about things. *Show* them by engaging all of their senses.

One quick word of advice, though: Don't get bogged down. Details may be dandy, but simplicity has its place, too. Try to write as clearly as you speak. Use short, familiar words, and vary your sentence length so you won't sound

monotonous. These easy steps will help you to express yourself well. This in turn lets you show readers how much you know, what you're thinking, and what you want. And that's the true goal of every writer.



### **Tip 15:**

### **Finish It in Style**

There's one more goal, of course. Eventually you want to STOP writing. In other words, you want to finish what you've started—and you want to do it in style. Because that's just the kind of person you are!



So, first things first. How do you know when you've really reached the end? It's pretty simple, really. Just ask yourself these questions:

- Have you **SOLVED** the problem?
- Have you **COMPLETED** the instructions?
- Have you **EXPRESSED** your entire opinion?
- Have you **INCLUDED** all of the information?

If you can answer "yes" to these questions, congratulations! You're ready to write your closing paragraph. This is a big moment, because your conclusion should be just as strong as your opening paragraph. After all, this is your last chance to impress your readers.

Gulp. Sounds scary, right? But it isn't as bad as it sounds. Remember, people have been writing for thousands of years, and they've come up with all sorts of great conclusion methods. All *you* need to do is understand these methods. Feel free to use whichever one suits your writing project.

One of the oldest tricks—and one of the best, too—is to write a closing sentence that reminds readers of your opening sentence. This technique is sometimes called “bringing it back to the beginning.” Here’s an example:

Opening sentence:

Thanks to my best friend, I learned to love eating sandwiches in the middle of the night.

Closing sentence:

It turns out that those midnight sandwiches didn’t just fill our bellies; they fed our friendship, too.

See how that works? You revisited your starting point.

At the same time, you said something new. It’s kind of like going from A to Z in one awesome little hop. Nicely done, writer!

Of course, there are plenty of *other* ways to get from A to Z. Without getting too detailed, here are a few of the best ones.

- **Use different words to restate your main idea.** This type of conclusion is simple, it's clear, and it doesn't leave the reader hanging.
- **End with a summary.** Read your rough draft again and highlight your major points. Summarize those points in your final paragraph.
- **Give one last example.** Without getting too elaborate, add one more simple example that supports your main point.
- **Offer a personal comment.** Make an observation about your subject, or even a prediction.
- **Issue a call to action.** In your final paragraph, urge readers to change their thoughts or actions.

Depending on your topic, any of these conclusions can work. Just keep in mind that continuity of feeling is important. Your closing sentence and paragraph should echo the mood of your opening. If you began with a funny sentence, for instance, you should close with a funny

sentence as well. If you started out seriously, then  
and seriously.

And with that bit of advice, we're ending this  
chapter. Seriously!




mmmm, midnight  
sandwiches.  
yummy-licious!

i want extra  
mayo on mine!



## Chapter 4:

# Don't Embarrass Yourself



okay, i'm  
blushing.



how could i  
even tell? you're  
**ALWAYS** pink!

Let's face it: Talking is easier than writing. For one thing, speech doesn't involve spelling or punctuation. It also doesn't require 100% perfect grammar. You can get away with all kinds of language mayhem when you gab with your pals.

Written communication, unfortunately, is different. Your spelling, sentence structure, and word choices are there for

the world to see. Readers may notice your mistakes. And THAT'll make your face red for sure.

Let's avoid that flushed feeling, shall we? This chapter addresses a few of the most common written errors. Learn those facts well and apply them whenever you write. You'll be glad you did. Your readers will thank you, too!

### **Tip 16:** No Run-Ons, No Fragments

Sentence structure is the first item on any writer's to-do list. In a grammatical sense, your sentences need to be just the right length: not too long, not too short. Too-long sentences are called run-ons. Too-short sentences are called fragments. Good writers avoid both of these pitfalls.

So what do these terms mean? Well, let's start with run-ons. A run-on sentence occurs when a writer doesn't use the right punctuation or conjunctions ( little words like *so*, *and*, *but* ) to join two sentence parts. The result is a sentence that goes on too long. It's awkward, it's hard to read, and it's just plain wrong.

Run-ons are pretty easy to fix. For instance, this run-on:

Let's trade balloons I like yours better.

can be corrected to read:

Let's trade balloons; I like yours better.

That's the deal with run-ons. Now, what about sentence fragments? These babies have the opposite problem from run-ons: They're too short. A fragment is a group of words that is supposed to be a sentence, but which lacks either a subject or a predicate (the action part).

The following "sentence" is missing a subject:

Bounced up and down.

( What bounced? We don't know. )

The following "sentence" is missing a predicate:

The cup of coffee.

( What did the coffee do? We don't know. )

Fix the first fragment by adding a subject ( *The **ball** bounced up and down* ). Fix the second fragment by adding a predicate ( *The cup of coffee **spilled** on my lap!* ).





let's **trade** balloons  
i like yours **better.**

whoa, you're  
missing a semicolon.  
but **yes**, my balloon  
**IS** sweeeeet!



## **Tip 17:** Watch Your Beginnings and Endings

So your sentences are the right length. That's a great start! Now let's talk about sentence beginnings and endings. There are right ways and wrong ways to do it, and you should know the difference.

Let's talk about beginnings first. In particular, let's discuss the words "And," "But," and "Or." Some people think it is *always* wrong to start sentences with these words. However, that's not true. Grammatically speaking, these words are perfectly fine. Go ahead and use them to start sentences when you want to add emphasis to your writing.

But watch out for the downside on this one. (*pssst*: See how we used "But" just now?) Although "And," "But," and "Or" can be effective sentence-starters, they are easily overused. For this reason, some people dislike this device. Ask your teacher how he or she feels, then follow that preference (in your schoolwork, at least).

Speaking of teacher preferences, now is a good time to

talk about sentence endings. Many teachers hate it when you end sentences with prepositions such as "around," "of," "about," and so on. This usage isn't wrong, exactly; there's no grammatical rule about it. Still, lots of people *think* it's wrong. Appease these readers by avoiding prepositional endings. Honestly, it isn't worth the fight.



a preposition is  
a **bad** word to end  
a sentence with.

hahaha! you  
just **did** it!



## Tip 18: One Letter Makes All the Difference

Some things, of course, *are* worth fighting for. Correct spelling is one of these things. In English, a single wrong letter can completely change a word's meaning. So it's a good idea to polish your spelling skills.

This is especially true when it comes to a few extra-tricky, almost-identical word pairs. Here are four commonly confused duos. Study this list until you know which word is which. Boring, maybe—but it'll make you a better writer. We promise!

- **Then/Than.** "Then" indicates a time sequence: *My friend sneezed, **then** blew his nose.* "Than" indicates a comparison: *Your ears are much longer **than** mine.*

- **Further/Farther.** "Further" means "to a greater degree" or "additional": *Let's talk **further** about this.* "Farther" always indicates physical distance: *I can run **farther** than you can.*

- **Sit/Set.** "Sit" usually means "to rest on the haunches".

**Sit** next to the campfire with me. "Set" usually means to place: **Set** the chocolate on the table.

• **Lie/Lay.** The word "lie" has many definitions. Its most often confused one is "to rest in a horizontal position": The cat **lies** on the cushion. The word "lay," too, has many definitions. Its most often confused one is "to put in position": **Lay** your coat on the couch. The big difference between these words is that "lay" requires an object. In other words, you can lay a pillow (the object) on the bed, but you can't lay on the bed (or anywhere else, for that matter). If you want to "lie" around, only "lie" will do!



let's talk more  
about spelling.

it's way better  
then . . . than . . . oops!



## Tip 19: Be Careful with Soundalikes

You've conquered a few spell-alikes. Now it's time to hit some *soundalikes*! These words drive writers nuts because they sound exactly the same. How the heck do you know which one to use?

Well, again, it's just a matter of attention. Study these common soundalikes until you can tell them apart. Then use the right words every time to pump up your writing power.

- **It's/Its.** Lots of people make this mistake, but it's an easy one to avoid. "It's" is *always* a contraction for either "it is" or "it has." In all other cases, "its" is correct.

- **You're/Your.** These words, too, are easy to tell apart. Just remember that "you're" is always a contraction for "you are." If you mean anything else—*anything*—then "your" is the word you need.

- **They're/There/Their.** Once again, contractions come to the rescue! Start by remembering that "they're" is always a contraction for "they are." Easy-peasy. Now let's

look at the other two words. "There" indicates a place or position: *Stand over **there**.* "Their" indicates possession: *The scary bear blocked **their** path.*

• **Two/Too/To.** "Two" is a number: *Take **two** aspirin and call me in the morning.* "Too" means "in addition" or "overly": *I want some cookies, **too**! There are way **too** many bats on this bus.* "To" indicates movement toward a person, place, or thing: *I biked **to** school. I gave the gum **to** the warthog.*



we make a  
great pear.

i think you  
mean *pair*, dude.  
and thanks, now  
i'm hungry.





## **Tip 20:** Avoid These Words

Now we come to the easy part of this chapter! We're going to give you a list of words to avoid. There's nothing to study and no judgment calls to make. Just DON'T. That's all we need to say about *that*.

- **Ain't.** Hundreds of years ago, this word was considered proper English. Today, it isn't! People who use it sound uneducated. AVOID THIS TRAP. Dump "ain't" from your writing (and your speech, too).
- **Could of/should of/would of/might of.** These phrases are wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong! You're looking for soundalike contractions: "could've," "should've," "would've," "might've." Or even better, just write things out: "could have," "should have."
- **Very/Really.** Okay, these words aren't wrong. They're just weak. "Very tired," for instance, is weaker than "exhausted." "Really pretty" is weaker than "beautiful." See how easy that is? Dump "very" and "really" whenever

possible for stronger, more colorful writing.

So guess what? You're now a grammar expert! Say goodbye to those blushes of embarrassment, because they're a thing of the past. You might get a little pink with *pride*, though, when people applaud your perfect prose. Don't be shy—take a bow. After all, you've earned it!



**all these rules  
make me  
really tired.**

**exhausted, you might  
even say. nap time!**



# Make It Even Better



You've finished your paper, or your letter, or your story, or whatever you were writing. It's time to turn it in, right?

Wrong!! What you have at this point is a first draft—and first drafts are usually pretty rough. They're full of mistakes. They don't always flow properly. Sometimes they're messy, too (especially if you're writing longhand).

So let's take a look at these things. The tips in this chapter will show you how to review and revise your writing. We're going to clean things up and make them SHINE!

Oh, and by the way? Don't be nervous. The hardest part is already done. Revising is LOTS easier than writing. With just a little know-how, you can turn a first draft into a final draft in no time at all!

### **Tip 21:** Fix the Little Stuff

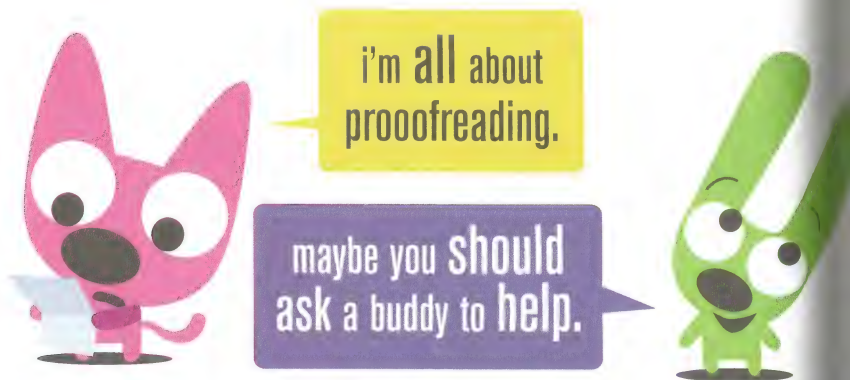
Correcting any little "technical" goofs is the first step in the revision process. Doing this can be tricky, especially when it comes to spelling. Because let's face it: If you're a bad speller, you're a bad speller. Nothing can magically turn you into a human dictionary.

Luckily, this isn't necessary. Real dictionaries and electronic tools can do the job for you! If you're not absolutely positive about a word's spelling, look it up. You can also use your computer's Spell Check feature if you're working in a word-processing program. Catch as many spelling errors as possible before handing in your work.

The same goes for capitalization and punctuation errors. Do your best to find and correct these "oopsies." This

step is all about proofreading. Read slowly and question *everything*. Fix any mistakes you find.

This is an area where your friends can help. Ask your buddies to proofread your work. They might find errors that you would miss. It's an easy, fun, and friendly way to improve your writing skills.



## **Tip 22:** Read It Out Loud

You've taken care of the basics. Now it's time for a slightly more advanced step. You're going to re-read your paper. Don't do it silently, though. Read **OUT LOUD** and **PROUD!**

Why out loud? Well, here's the thing. Speaking correctly is easier than writing correctly. Many people make written mistakes that they would *never* make when talking. Reading out loud is like speaking, so it helps you to spot any grammatical goof-ups that have slipped into your work.

This technique makes it easy to hear flow problems, too. Weak connections between sentences and paragraphs will pop right out at you. Read slowly so you don't miss these transition problems. Highlight any areas that need to be addressed.

Are you feeling extra brave? Enlist that friend again! Read aloud to your friend, or let the friend do the reading. Either way, you'll get a fresh perspective. Your friend can help you to identify mistakes and areas for improvement.



will you read  
my paper?

absolutely. that's  
what friends are for!



## **Tip 23:** Fix the Big Stuff

So you've taken care of the small stuff. You've identified a few bigger issues as well. That means it's time to take the next step. That's right: You need to dive in and revise your work.

Your structure is the first thing to tackle. Check to see if your ideas are organized in a sensible way. If they aren't, reorder things to create a clearer picture. You can even add new information, if necessary. Look through your original project notes for facts that would improve your paper. Now's the time to put them in!

Now is also the time to fix any flow problems. Make sure all of the sentences in each paragraph support the main idea. Remove any sentences that don't belong. Check your transitions *between* paragraphs, too. Each text chunk should be clearly linked to its neighbors.

Once your structure is in order, you can move on to the specifics. For starters, review your opening sentence



and paragraph. Are they clear? Do they make an impact? Review your conclusion, too. Does it sum things up in a satisfying way? Does it restate your main idea? Does it echo your opening in some way? You should be able to answer “Yes” to all of these questions. If you can’t, rewrite your introduction and conclusion to make them stronger.

You can make your overall language stronger, too. Check to make sure your words paint a vivid picture. If they don’t, add facts, sensory details, thoughts, and feelings. Remove vague words and replace them with more precise words. Punch things up to captivate your readers!

Entertaining readers, of course, may be only part of your goal. You might also be trying to educate people in some way. If so, make sure you’re succeeding. For instance, are you writing instructions? Then make sure you’ve included all the steps, in the right order. Are you trying to persuade your readers in some way? Make sure you’ve given them enough information (and maybe a few opinions, too).

Accomplishing your purpose is a big subject. We could

go on and on about it! But we won't. Let's keep things short and just say that good writing boils down to one fact: It's all about communication. Do people understand what you've written? Do they like it? Do they get your point? If so, congratulations! You've done your job.



**Tip 24:** Create a Final Draft

You've done the *writing* part, anyway. But your work isn't quite complete. You still need to create your final draft. That's the polished, perfect product you will give to your

teacher, or drop into the mail, or post on the Internet. Can you smell the success? You should. You're really in the home stretch now!

Your first move at this point is to review any format instructions you received. For instance, teachers sometimes tell students to use specific writing implements, or fonts, or spacing, or even paper types. They might also ask for a certain number of words. Make sure you understand these and any other assignment requirements.

So do you "get" the assignment? Are you sure??

*Positive??*

Yes?

Well then. Take out a clean piece of paper or sit down at your computer. Take a deep breath . . . hold it . . . let it out. Calm yourself! Then carefully, slowly, and as neatly as possible, start copying or typing your final draft. Stay focused all the way through your final sentence. Remember, you have put huge amounts of time and effort into your work. It already sounds its best. It should *look* its best, too.



### **Tip 25:** Reward Yourself for Success!

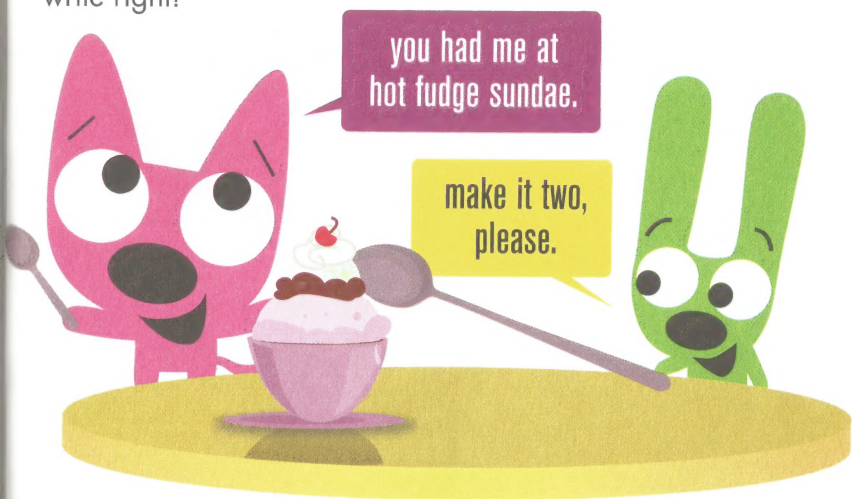
And it does. It's a thing of beauty! A work of art! A masterpiece beyond compare!

Well, okay, we can't actually SEE your creation. But we're sure it's gorgeous. The bottom line is, you've created something special—and that deserves a celebration. It's time to reward yourself for your writing success.

What reward will you choose? It's totally up to you. You could indulge in a hot fudge sundae or a bubble bath; take

a nap; listen to some music; or pedal your bike around the neighborhood. You could also spend some uninterrupted time on the phone, chat on the Internet, or go to a movie with your friends.

Of course, you could also do absolutely nothing. Find a comfy spot, relax, and enjoy the quiet. You've earned it! Don't be surprised, though, if you find your mind drifting to your *next* writing project. Writers write; they can't help it. And you're a writer now, so what are you waiting for? Dive back in there. Show the world that you know how to write right!



## Conclusion

Hiiiiii there! So did you like our book? WE liked it. I think we even learned something! Learning is cool!!

But you know what was even cooler? It was seeing YOU. We just LOVE spending time with our fans. And guess what? We're fans, too! We're YOUR fans! Dude, you're going to be a famous writer. We can tell. Just don't forget us when you're, like, a giant STAR. We'll always love writing. . . . and we'll always love YOU, too.

XOXOXO . . . again,









Shhhh . . . this book is full of secrets . . .

. . . the secrets to good writing! Best buddies  
hoops&yoyo didn't become talented writers overnight.  
They learned lots of skills and tips from this writing  
guide and had to practice, practice, practice.  
Now they'll let YOU in on all the ways to become  
a super-cool writer extraordinaire!



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